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MEXICO CHANGES ITS PRESIDENT

BY CARLETON BEALS

WE were burning along the road to Guadalupe Hidalgo, the religious capital of Mexico, situated just four miles north of Mexico City, close behind the auto of Pablo Gonzalez, rebel General, in order to reach as soon as possible the spot where a Carranza military train, bound for Vera Cruz, had been wrecked and two others detained. Red Cross machines were flashing by, flags stiff in the breeze, returning to the city with dead and wounded.

At a blocked crossing a young woman of about twenty-five jumped from a jitney, also on its way from Guadalupe and rushed frantically towards the General's car. That moment the way cleared, and with a sputter of gears his machine leapt away. Without a word I opened the door of our car and she stepped in.

"Oh, catch him, catch him!" she cried and burst into sobs.

She was so agitated it was impossible to question her.

Gonzalez stopped his machine after about a mile to walk across the fields to the first of the military trains where it stood on a long curve, its windows smashed and its cars full of bullet holes.

The girl rushed towards him as he stepped to the ground.

His aides attempted to hold her away, but Gonzalez motioned them aside.

I failed to hear her words,—only the reply of the General.

"He will not be shot," he was saying. "With this card you can see him. He is being detained at the National Palace."

He wrote something on a card and gave it into her shaking hands. With a hurried word of thanks to me and an explanation that her husband had been on the train in front

of the one we were in when it was attacked, she was gone.

We hastened on to the wrecked train, which lay three miles further, beyond Guadalupe.

That morning the Carranza Government had fled to Vera Cruz. The last train left the station fifteen minutes before the rebels entered the city. The rebel General, Guajardo, was ordered to detain them. Two he had no need to stop. One train was voluntarily surrendered by the Carranza general in charge. A second lost its wheels through the sabotage of the shop workers who are one hundred per cent Obregonista. A third was stopped with machine guns. The rest had escaped. But a daring Major with twelve soldiers sprang into a locomotive and gave chase. When within sight of the last train, the throttle was opened wide, and every one leapt from the cabin. Like the finale of an impossible movie film the locomotive hurtled down the track, crashing into the rear of the Carranza train, utterly destroying three cars and disabling the remainder.

As we walked along the blood-stained ground beside the cars we encountered a mass of wreckage, gay-colored uniforms among scattered papers and splintered guns, a great safe half buried in the mud, battered trunks, torn knapsacks. A little boy straddled a saddle on the top of a broken desk by the side of an irrigation ditch, where papers and stray soldiers' caps floated on the muddy water. A swarm of soldiers and their ragged wives were sorting over the refuse, salvaging their own petty belongings and purloining what they could. Two men were sneaking across the fields with a big roll of wire carried on a stick between them. At the front of the train a half-dozen bodies awaited the Red-Cross autos to carry them to Mexico City.

Afar coming down the Guadalupe hills, and outlined against the sombre sky, filed the Carranzists cavalry which had fled from the wrecked and detained trains—coming down to surrender. The roads were full of troops, hurrying from all sides towards the capital. Officers' automobiles criss-crossed the countryside—stopped, gave orders, rushed on. Mexico had changed its government.

The whole revolution has been remarkable. It was thought that Carranza with his fist of iron had mastered the country. Certainly for more than a year no organized rebellion has existed. Yet in a few weeks the Carranza Government crumbled and its master minds fled for their lives.

Trouble began for Carranza with the mistreatment of Obregon and his followers during the last few months of the presidential campaign. Carranza had determined to impose Ignacio Bonillas, former Ambassador to the United States, upon the people, with the slogan of "Down with Militarism." To this end elections were seized in the various states by fraudulent methods on the part of the Government. Obregonista followers were murdered—1,200 of them in the Yucatan elections. Obregon meetings were broken up with the drawn sabers of the man on horseback. Obregon followers were spirited away to prisons. Obregon himself was arrested upon a faked-up charge of rebellion against the Government. This was for two purposes: to prevent Obregon from campaigning and to keep him in the capital where he might be seized at a moment's notice. Obregon was insulted with the most irritating trivialities. The knowing shook their heads and predicted that Obregon would be in prison—or shot—within a week.

Obregon had the support of the people of Mexico.

And he had the support of the army. Carranza had been building up the power of the military establishment at the expense of civil life. Eighty-five percent of his revenue, in actual amount a sum greater than the entire income of Diaz, went to the army. Schools were closed, until but a handful remained in the whole republic, and teachers of the University were forced to work for part pay while military officers were drawing fabulous sums from the national treasury. Plutarcho Calles, acting as Secretary of Industry and Labor, found he had not enough money at his disposal to appoint a single factory inspector. Every department of government was curtailed, except the military.

A few days after the arrest of Obregon, April 10, Sonora seceded temporarily from the union under the leadership of its legally elected governor, de la Huerta, now to become acting President under the programme of Agua Prieta, and Brigadier General Plutarcho Calles.

On April 13, Obregon, disguised as a brakeman, escaped from the city, going to Michoacan where the Governor and the federal troops flocked to his side. This was soon followed by the secession of other states, until the Central Government had lost control of thirteen states.

No news was received in the capital. The newspapers were rigorously censored, and some of the dailies even sup-

pressed and the editors arrested. But bit by bit the knowledge came that the new movement had in a few days gained remarkable headway. Troop movements became more frequent. Regiment after regiment swung down the streets of the capital to entrain. Troop after troop of picked cavalry left for the field.

Business took me to the office of the Secretary of War every evening. I could see that all was not going well. Daily new faces appeared and old ones disappeared. Every night the waiting rooms were more crowded with people. I was told confidentially of a score of things that never appeared in the papers and have not appeared to this day. All of my informants were Obregonistas at heart,—I could even sense a sullen recalcitrancy and hatred toward Barragan and Urquizo. I learned of wholesale desertions,—how all the soldiers sent to Sonora had followed Calles and de la Huerta, how the governor of Zacatecas had rebelled, how Chihuahua had fallen into the hands of Villa. I learned of battles in the Federal District and the neighboring state of Mexico. I knew that Gonzalez was in open revolt near Puebla even while the papers were reporting interviews and declarations of loyalty.

On May 3 the papers finally admitted that Gonzalez and three other Generals were in open revolt. On May 5 the city of Puebla, the second largest city of the Republic, and fifty miles from the capital, was reported to have fallen. A more important fact, which had never been reported in the press, was the fact that Texcoco, the seat of the ancient civilization of the great king, Nezahuacoyotl, a town but an hour-and-a-half's ride on the train, and but across the lake from Mexico City, had been in the hands of the rebels for almost a week.

The news of Gonzalez' defection electrified the city. People immediately remembered past revolutions when water and light had been cut, when food became scarce and almost impossible of purchase, when people had dropped dead on the streets from starvation, when one faction had held the arsenal and another the national palace and amused themselves by firing across the city so that people had to remain indoors for days and weeks. There was an immediate rush on the grocery stores and markets, until one almost had to fight in order to make a purchase. People came in coaches and automobiles and carried away

hundreds of dollars worth of food-stuffs. Prices went skywards.

The money situation became acute. The small-change question has always been difficult in Mexico City ever since the price of silver went up. In fact, silver has disappeared from circulation. To relieve the situation gold pieces as small as two pesos, or one dollar American money, have been coined, bronze pieces up to twenty centavos, and paper money in denominations of fifty centavos and one peso. The news regarding Gonzalez immediately made the paper money worthless, although the Government continued redeeming it—with bronze. Small change had well-nigh disappeared—people were hoarding it until the days of the actual revolution.

The next few days some confidence returned. Carranza maintained his pose of perfect confidence. He declared that no elections would be held until the country was pacified. The Government continued redeeming the paper money. It is true that they counted the bills handed in from the surging mass of people very slowly and deliberately, and it is true that they paid in bronze instead of gold; but they paid. Troops were paraded up and down. On May 5, which corresponds to our Decoration Day, the city, as usual, was gay with flags, and the customary parade passed down the fashionable avenues to the cemeteries. It is true that there were fewer troops, but Carranza himself was there,—he had not fled from the city as persistent rumor had declared,—there with his uniform and his gold braid, waving and smiling at the people. It is true that there were no "Vivas", but Carranza had not received very many for more than a year.

Mexico City went to sleep confident that the end was not yet. People did not know that that very night the crack army of the republic under Dieguez, with the bulk of the military supplies, had revolted; they did not know that the Fifth of May had witnessed the fall of Celaya, the railway junction of Iripuata, Guadalajara and Queretaro; that thousands of rebel troops were hovering on the outskirts of the city; they did not know that plans had already been made for changing the Government to Vera Cruz; that all day on the Fifth of May, when they were watching the troops pass in review, the employees of the Government were busy packing the archives, the furniture,

the gold, the printing presses, the property of the nation and the people to be found in the railway offices, the National Palace, the Castle of Chapultepec, and the rest of the government buildings.

The next morning Carranza issued a blatant manifesto at the close of which he declared that he would never give up the executive power until the rebellion was put down and a successor legitimately elected—according to Carranza's ideas of a legitimate election. General Murguía placarded the walls of the town with a brave proclamation addressed to the soldiers of the Republic and containing a bitter, virulent attack upon the revolutionaries, and telling the people of the determination of the Government to fight to the bitter end to maintain the principles of constitutional government and law.

And all day they were packing government property. All day they were laying plans to loot the national treasury. They did not intend to leave a movable thing. They stripped the old historical relics from Chapultepec Palace. They took furniture, papers, inkwells and pins. They did it under the guise of establishing the Government at Vera Cruz. As a matter of fact they had a German steamer detained at that port for the purposes of possible embarkation. That night I strolled up to the office of the Secretary of War. Carranza was supposed to have left at five o'clock. The Palacio was in confusion. The loot was still going on. They were carting everything out of the offices: old dusty books, bent rusty swords, broken drums—everything.

I edged through the hubbub, passed the guard at the door, and spoke to a friend, a Captain, in the inner office. Tomorrow he would be rolling the city in the private car of the rebel General, Gonzalez, one of his aides.

"Going to Vera Cruz?" I asked jestingly.

"On our way," he replied laughing.

"When did Carranza leave?"

"Oh, he's still here—leaving in the morning at three o'clock."

It is not easy to move a whole Government on a few hours' notice. It means a sudden alteration in the lives of thousands of people. It means separations and heartbreaks if a new Government is coming in on the morrow.

In the flat above us lived an aviation officer and his bride. He drove home in his motor at midnight with the news that

he had to leave for Vera Cruz at three o'clock. They paced the floor until a few minutes before three, when he took his hurried departure at the gate.

Carranza left with the same brave swagger. His train pulled out at ten o'clock the next morning—not at three. The last of the Government trains left at eleven-fifteen. The rebel troops entered at eleven-thirty. He was reported flinging copper to the people and making speeches as he passed through Guadalupe Hidalgo. The people were more interested in the coppers than in his speeches.

I saw the cars when they left the station. Up until the last moment loot was being loaded, there was running to and fro, giving of orders, shouting of oaths, knocking down of mild-eyed train-men who didn't understand military discipline. Military officers bustled about, or anxiously paced the long platform, sad-eyed women peeked furtively through the windows. An air of doubt and uncertainty hung ominously over the hurried departure.

The rebels entered straight from the hills on lean wiry ponies, covered with dust and many days' growth of beard, weary from hard travel and lack of sleep.

For eighteen hours the city had been without police protection, for the police are paid by the National Government. Yet no one seemed to mind. The street cars and busses continued running. Business houses, while they kept their show-windows shuttered, had their doors open for trade. Fashionable women paraded the shopping district, and turned to look, half-indifferently, when the first troop of rebel cavalry dashed down the street, red handkerchiefs about their necks, Brobdignagian sombreros, broad as baobab trees on their heads to protect them from the hot hill-sun, carbines held at the hip. Yet even the automobiles did not stop as they passed. The city was in a holiday humor, it seemed. Earlier in the morning I had seen a group of small boys seize the go-and-stop signs for the crossings, set them up and regulate traffic, much to the amusement of the passing throngs on the streets and the automobile drivers who religiously obeyed the painted commands. No one minded. During the night but two crimes occurred: a robbery in a bakery-shop, and the looting of a small grocery store, this in a population of over a million.

At twelve I hastened to the Plaza Mayor just in time

to hear the proclamation of the new Government read from the Presidential balcony of the Palacio. The tired cavalry were drawn up around the square, wild, outré, picturesque, a splash of color against the gray walls of Cathedral and Palace, and the green of the park. General Treviño, who almost a year ago to the day was entertained at West Point and offered a cruiser of war by the United States Government in which to go to Europe, read the proclamation. The people held aloof, perhaps fearing a repetition of what had occurred one other day years before when they crowded into the Plaza and the machine guns opened fire. But a few hundred people heard the few short sentences which guaranteed all business, commerce and industry protection against his soldiers, threatened the profiteers, and put the city under the command of the revolutionaries. After the reading of the proclamation the peons crowded into the great Cathedral balconies and began ringing the huge brazen bells, that flung their sound across the city hour after hour, until dark had come.

Sunday, May 9th, Obregon marched into the city with 20,000 troops. Every inch of the way from the suburb of Tacubaya to the Palacio was jammed with people to watch him pass by. He received an ovation such as Carranza never received. The people for over a year have known that Carranza betrayed them, that he brought their country into disrepute among the family of nations, and there are no regrets. At the Plaza Mayor, although two hours behind schedule, Obregon could scarcely force his way to the Palacio. Again the great brazen bells rang out across the flat-roofed city. Obregon did not even enter the Palacio. He is a man of action, not of words. He saluted General Gonzalez on the Presidential balcony, said a half-dozen sentences from his automobile, and was gone.

Obregon telegraphed to spare the life of Carranza. Practically all Carranzist prisoners have been released. The constitution will be upheld. The delegates to Congress will be recognized and permitted to elect a provisional president. The members of the Supreme Court who have not fled from the city will continue in office. Elections will be held, according to the Constitution, in July. Obregon has wired Bonillas to return and continue his campaign, even though he was taken prisoner with Carranza. The rapidity with which the revolution of the Obregonistas

gained headway, the ease with which they assumed their responsibility when the Carranza Government fled, the calm continuation of the normal life of the Republic, the noteworthy spirit of fair play and regard for the forms of law and order, mark this revolution as unique in the history of Mexico.

But Obregon was careful to keep the military control in his own hands. He directed the military operations throughout the Republic. It was to him that the rebel chiefs sent in their adhesion to the new movement. It was to him that men came for orders and advice.

For a time the atmosphere in the capital was electric with possibilities of trouble between Obregon and Gonzalez. Rumors of friction and open disagreement were rife. But those who were informed knew that there would be no trouble between the two. Gonzalez' military following had not been kept intact prior to the revolution nor during the revolution. Furthermore, Obregon was the secret idol of the lower officers, and in many cases of the soldiers throughout the army. In addition he stood closer to the earlier ideals of the revolution.

By clever manipulation Obregon gained the allegiance of the stronger men in the Gonzalez camp. He knew, for instance, the worth of Treviño, the military brains of the Gonzalez following. Accordingly he removed him temporarily from the scene by sending him after Carranza, and gained his passive allegiance by promising him a cabinet position. Obregon always has had his finger on the pulse of the military situation. It soon became evident that he had more plums to offer than Gonzalez and one by one the military leaders came over to his side. Not until Gonzalez was almost isolated did he issue his manifesto withdrawing from the presidential campaign to engage in private business. The way was now clear for the solidification of the Obregon government.

During these events the chief remaining excitement was focused upon Carranza, who had fled with such a sublime gesture, hastening to ignominy and death.

He never seemed to realize the weakness of his position nor to be aware of the universal hate and execration he had aroused. As the trains rolled on their way to Vera Cruz, where the scenery was excellent he got out to take photographs. For three days the expedition was a sort of tourist

outing, a company of sight-seers among strangers.

On the ninth and tenth the expedition halted at Apizalco, half way to Vera Cruz, in the shadow of the great towering Sierra Madres and the precipitous sides of the ancient, volcanic Malintzi. Ixtaccihuatl, the Sleeping Woman, cut a corner out of the Southwest sky, while straight ahead down the sweep of tracks could be seen the mighty, snow-capped Orizaba, shouldering up to a height of over seventeen thousand feet.

The Indians of the village went about their regular routine of life, with little concern that national history was being made. The fat, dirty women pattered barefooted down the dusty streets with great jarros of pulque and atole, or set themselves up in business beside the trains, cooking lunches of frijoles, tortillas, enchiladas and tortas; only scampering away from time to time during the day of the tenth when the thud of bullets on adobe walls and the rattle and pound of cavalry announced the approach of some rebel force. But Carranza gave away no more gold. A dark premonition of trouble hung over the expedition which had already lost its rearguard under Colonel Fontes.

From that time on until the fourteenth the number of rebel troops steadily increased, the amount of roadbed to be relaid entailed a staggering amount of labor, and the hope of reaching Vera Cruz became steadily less. Food became scarce; water exchanged hands for the sum of five pesos a glass; desertions became more and more frequent.

Obregon had already offered to guarantee Carranza's safe conduct to Vera Cruz, or anywhere else—without his loot—but Carranza stubbornly refused to listen to any overtures. He had told his daughter he would come back victorious or dead.

The expedition had penetrated some thirty-five or forty kilometers beyond Apizalco when on the fourteenth it was beset on all sides by revolutionary forces. All hope of escape to Vera Cruz was completely shattered. Candido Aguilar, the President's son-in-law, had been forced to flee from his troops in Vera Cruz to the mountains because of the revolt of Guadalupe Sanchez. Sanchez was now attacking Carranza's front. Treviño was at his back.

Even at the last Carranza tried to make his escape by motor, thus carrying away a part of the gold, but finding this impracticable, the trains and archives were set on fire,

and the President and his mock cabinet took to their horses across the hills.

The little party penetrated some ninety odd miles before that final tragedy occurred that brought them all once more back to the capital, some to flee and go in hiding, some to go to prison, and Carranza to be conducted to his grave.

The death of Carranza is still shrouded in mystery. The man accused by the followers of Carranza is Rodolfo Herrero, a Pelaez bandit, who offered his allegiance to Carranza. Upon receipt of Herrero's offer General Mariel was sent to meet him. General Mariel had been the acting assistant in the Secreteria de Guerra y Marina. He is a tall, black-bearded, heavy-set man, who always walks with an exaggerated erectness, indicative of an innate pomposity, a man who has always given me a creepy sense of cruelty, perhaps because of his sensuous, cynical mouth and relentless eyes. The two were not long in coming to an understanding and they rejoined the party in the Pueblo of Huachinango. The second night following Herrero's adhesion, Carranza was murdered, or, as Herrero insists, committed suicide. The men who slept in the same room with Carranza, Berlanga, Barragan, Mariel, Urquizo, Murgúia and the rest declare that Carranza was shot by Herrero's men with the shouts of "Viva Obregon."

The principals in this tragedy are, as this is written, held in the military prison of Santo Domingo, and hearings are being conducted to determine the manner of Carranza's death. Detectives sent to look over the scene where it occurred declare that the furniture formerly in the room had been changed, and all evidences of the struggle removed. The hearings tend more and more to prove that Carranza could not have committed suicide, but on the other hand very little has been done to fix the guilt. The investigations have gradually receded from the public eye, until they no longer call for front page notice. Some revival of interest was aroused by the escape of General Juan Barragan, Carranza's chief of staff, a youth of twenty-six years, and his probable seclusion in the Italian Embassy; and the discovery that Luis Cabrera, former Minister of Finance, is hiding in the Argentine Embassy, from which point he sends forth vitriolic articles to one of the daily papers regarding the new régime.

Carranza's funeral was a sorry affair, attended by a

few hundred people and the diplomatic corps. Six men carried the plain, flag-draped mahogany bier, and the curious pressed upon them so importunately that they were almost overthrown. As the coffin left I saw but one floral decoration, although others were on the electric funeral car to which he was carried. He left few indeed to mourn his departure.

His death, while it cast a stain upon the militarists behind the revolution, cleared the situation, and gave to the new Government an aspect of legality that it might not otherwise have possessed. From the first, Congress was beset by legal and technical difficulties. According to the Mexican Constitution only the President or the Comisión Permanente of Congress might convene the two bodies in special session. The President had fled, and with him a majority of the Comisión Permanente. Who was to call Congress? Such absurd suggestions were offered as having Congress call itself, appoint a new Comisión Permanente, which could convene Congress a second time.

According to the Plan de Agua Prieta, the original programme of legal procedure put forth by the revolutionaries, de la Huerta was named supreme Jefe of the new movement, and in case of its success was to call Congress or if necessary a special Convention of delegates appointed by the governors adhering to the plan. Some of the new leaders—those of the Gonzalez camp—did not accept the plan. But de la Huerta took its acceptance for granted, and telegraphed a date for the convening of Congress. Congress was glad to have the Gordian knot cut, and glad to have some one take the responsibility.

The second legal question centered in the appointment of a new President. As long as Carranza remained alive, a question would present itself of the legality of the Government de facto. Congress planned to get around this by resorting to the Constitutional provision that the President cannot change his official residence without the consent of the legislative branch. This was to serve as a technical grounds for impeachment. The whole problem was changed by the death of Carranza, when Congress was forced to appoint a new president as promptly as possible.

De la Huerta, the man chosen, the ex-governor of Sonora, one of the most progressive and prosperous states in the Mexican federation, has shown himself a man of keen

intelligence, courage and capacity for work. His cabinet is composed of some of the most enlightened men of Mexico.

It is, of course, too soon to tell what steps the new Government will take towards reconstruction,—reconstruction that was delayed during the Huerta and Carranza régimes.

The crying problem is the military problem. Mexico, were it better organized, would be more militaristic than old Germany. The army consists of 150,000 men and costs the Government over \$1,000,000 pesos a day. With the adhesion of all the rebel elements except Villa, there is no need for more than 50,000 men at most, and in fact this is the number that has been determined upon by the new Secretary of War, Plutarcho Elias Calles. An army of 50,000 men efficiently organized would be more wieldy and in comparison to the present but a small drain upon the strained national resources.

But the reduction of the army is a ticklish problem, a cracker likely to explode in the hand. Fortunately the man who is in many respects the most capable man in Mexico today has the work in hand: Plutarcho Calles, ex-school teacher, ex-soldier, ex-Secretary of Commerce and Labor, ex-leader of the Sonora secession, a man of indomitable will, courage, and devotion to principle.

CARLETON BEALS.